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IV.

AGASA CASTE.

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AGASAS.

Agasas, or as they are sometimes called Asagas, are the washerman class found all over the State. According to the last Census (1901), their population was 90,962, the sexes being nearly equal in numbers. About a fourth of them are found in the Mysore District; Shimoga and Tumkur contribute each an eighth of the population, followed by Bangalore with almost the same number. **Name and number.**

The name by which the caste is most commonly known is Agasa (ಅಗಸ), Asaga (ಅಸಗ) being another form of the word. Madivaḷa (ಮಡಿವಾಳ) or Viraghaṭa Madivaḷa (ವೀರಘಟ ಮಡಿವಾಳ) is the name which they apply to themselves. They also call themselves, though less usually, Mallige Mádevi Vakkalu (ಮಲ್ಲಿಗೆ ಮಾದೇವಿ ಒಕ್ಕಲು) or devotees of Mallige Màdevi.

Chákalavandlu, Vaṇṇán and Dhóbi are Telugu, Tamil and Hindustani equivalents of the Kannada name Agasa. In Sanskrit the caste is known by the term Rajaka (ರಜಕ).

Ayya, *Appa* and *Aṇṇa* are the usual titles affixed to the names; sometimes they add the term *Setti* as their name ending and their yajaman or headman has the title of *Gauḍa*.

The meaning of the term Agasa is obscure. Mr. Stuart, Census Superintendent, Madras, in his Report for 1891, says that the word is derived from *Agasi* said to mean a turban, a meaning which could not be verified. The term *Agasa* seems to be a later form of *Asaga*. *Madivaḷa* means a person who makes cloths *madi* or clean. *Viraghaṭa Madivala* is applied to the caste on account of their supposed descent from *Virabhadra* (ವೀರಭದ್ರ) the son of Siva. They are styled also *Mallige Madevi Vakkalu*, as they are the *Vakkalu* or devotees of a goddess known by that name. *Rajaka* means a dyer of clothes, corresponding to the Tamil name *Vaṇṇan* which means the same thing.

Language. They speak both Kannada and Telugu according to their place of residence.

Origin. The following story is given to account for the origin of the caste. On the occasion of Daksha's sacrifice, Virabhadra got his clothes blood-stained when killing Daksha and his companions. He appeared before Siva and thoughtlessly allowed his impure garments to come in contact with the great god. He was then doomed to fall from his high state, and condemned to expiate his sin by washing the clothes of Basava and his followers in Kalyan. This was the washerman named Máchayya who is described as a follower of Basava, in the 21st Chapter of the Basava Puràṇa.

There is another and a more childish story current about their origin. Five goddesses, Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Parvati, consorts of the three members of the Triad, and Sachi and Chháyá, wives of Indra and Súrya, when in their monthly sickness, felt a difficulty in getting some one to wash their clothes.* Just then they saw a woman coming towards them with a boy, and asked her to do this work, promising to give whatever she desired as her remuneration. The woman took the clothes to the sea in a bundle and finding no stone slab to wash the clothes on, cut off the head of the boy, used his blood as colouring matter, eyes as indigo, the flesh as fuller's-earth, the back as a slab, legs as fuel and forearms as ironing rods and the abdomen as the pot. She obtained fire by praying to Agni, the god of fire, and thus cleaning the clothes, she took them back to the divine ladies. They were naturally gratified at the result, but not finding the boy with her, they questioned the woman, who reluctantly informed them of the use she had made of his mortal frame. Highly touched by the act of devotion, they told her to call him by name, and when she did so, lo! the boy stood smiling before her. The gods of the Triad, pleased on hearing this, promised her a further boon, which she formulated as knee-deep water (for washing), ankle-deep food (as wages) and a monopoly of washing clothes. The Agasas are the progeny of this person of the original washerwoman.

*Washing clothes worn during such period is considered a very low kind of service; and when people wish to exhibit their contempt for others, especially for washermen, they call them washers of polluted clothes.

Basava is said to have converted some of the washermen living in Kalyan into Lingayatas, of which persuasion there are found some men in this caste at present.

Divisions.

The caste, as found in the State, has two main endogamous divisions, based upon the language they speak, Kannada Agasas and Telugu Agasas.

There are also found in small numbers Mahratta and Hindustani Agasas with their name endings of *Singh* and *Rao*, but they are immigrants of quite a recent date.

These main divisions neither intermarry nor eat together, and the Telugu section is again divided into following subdivisions* which are endogamous. They are:—*Murikináti* (ಮುರಿಕಿನಾಟಿ), *Pasupunáti* (ಪಸುಪುನಾಟಿ), *Asádi* (ಆಸಾದಿ), *Edumóllu* (ಏಡುಮೋಳ್ಳು) and *Padaharu Panam vandlu* (ಪದ ಹಾರುಫಣಂವಾಂಡು), that is, those of the sixteen *phanas.*

It is stated that where marriages of widows are allowed, the offspring of such unions form a distinct division with which the others do no enter into relations of matrimony; but it is likely that the distinction is obliterated in one or two generations.

They have no exogamous divisions. In some places, the identity of the several families is preserved by their allegiance to the same family god, and the memory of their relationship is kept up by the annual or periodical celebration of worship in honour of their tutelary deities. Some have divisions called after a well-known ancestor in each family (ಮನೆತನ), such as Lakkappana Kaḷayyana Manetana (ಲಕ್ಕಪ್ಪನ ಕಾಳಯ್ಯನ ಮನೆತನ), Jogi Siddayyana Manetana (ಜೋಗಿ ಸಿದ್ದಯ್ಯನ ಮನೆತನ), Kempa Lingayyana Manetana (ಕೆಂಪ ಲಿಂಗಯ್ಯನ ಮನೆತನ). But these distinctions, however, get lost in course of time by the common ancestry being forgotten or the worship of a new god being taken up.†

They have no hypergamous divisions.

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* These divisions appear to be territorial in origin and require further investigation.

† A section of these carry on their professional work at night while others do so in the day time according to the custom of their families. But this distinction has no significance in their social relations.

A few people have returned the following as their exogamous divisions, namely, *Mugilu kula* (ಮುಗಿಲುಕುಲ); *Belli kula* (ಬೆಳ್ಳಿಕುಲ) and *Halu kula* (ಹಾಲುಕುಲ); and a few others *Kumbaloru* (ಕುಂಬಳೋರು) Murugalloru (ಮುರುಗಳ್ಳೋರು), *Húvinavaru* (ಹೂವಿನವರು owers) *Khandagadavaru* (ಖಂಡಗದವರು); but this matter requires verification.

Birth ceremonies.

When a child is born, the mother is confined to a room with the child and is considered unclean for 4, 6 or 8 days, after which they are bathed and become fit to go into the inner house. The purification is done with some ceremony; married women seating the mother and child on a plank near a small pit made by the side of the house, smear the mother with turmeric and perform *arati.* This is called *Guṇi Sâstra* (pit ceremony).

Some of the castemen are entertained at a dinner, and the most elderly member of the caste present suggests the name to be given. The mother and the child are seated in front of a winnow placed back upwards on a spot purified with cowdung and streaked with three lines of red earth, to which *púja* is made by burning incense and offering a broken cocoanut. The midwife applies a little butter with *baje* root in the baby's mouth, and calls it by the name decided upon. In some places, a number of children are invited to a dinner of *huggi** and after making a hearty meal of it, they are made to repeat the name to be given to the child. The child is first put into a swinging cradle on the evening of this day, married women invited for the occasion singing songs.

Koracha women are also sometimes consulted before the name is fixed upon. But generally, as in other castes, the name of the child is given after that of either a deceased ancestor or the family god. If after the name is given the child should get ill or suffer from other ailment, the first name is dropped and a new name given.

There are no names peculiar to the caste. Pet names, such as Appajee (ಅಪ್ಪಾಜಿ), Appayya (ಅಪ್ಪಯ್ಯ), Appoda (ಅಪ್ಪೋಡ), Chinna Papa (ಚಿನ್ನಪಾಪ), Puttasámi (ಪುಟ್ಟಸಾಮಿ) &c., are in use. The following names are commonly found :—

Men	*Women*
Pápa (ಪಾಪ)	Duggamma (ದುಗ್ಗಮ್ಮ)
Timma (ತಿಮ್ಮ)	Kariamma (ಕರಿಯಮ್ಮ)
Obaḷiga (ಓಬಳಿಗ)	Muni† (ಮುನಿ)
Muniya (ಮುನಿಯ)	Timmi (ತಿಮ್ಮಿ)
Lenke (ಲೆಂಕೆ)	Venkaṭi (ವೆಂಕಟಿ)
Sotta (ಸೊತ್ತು)	Rámi (ರಾಮಿ)

* Rice and broken pulse cooked together with some spices added.

† Feminine names in Kannada and other Dravidian Languages end in *i* generally, and *amma* is added as an honorific suffix and means mother or mistress.

Names of base objects are sometimes given, such as Aḍavappa (ಅಡಿವಪ್ಪ deɜert man), Gudlappa (ಗುದ್ಲಪ್ಪ, *i.e.*, spade-man), Tippa (ತಿಪ್ಪ, *i.e.*, manure heap), Kallappa (ಕಲ್ಲಪ್ಪ, *i.e.*, stone man) and Javaráya (ಜವರಾಯ, *i.e.*, god of death).

Adoption.

Adoption is allowed and practised. In general, brother's sons are selected by preference, but a brother cannot be taken in adoption.*

Marriage.

Polygamy is not prohibited but is rarely practised. Want of issue, bodily defect or incurable disease and want of additional hands for work, are the principal motives to induce a man to take more than one wife. Polyandry is unknown.

Both infant and adult marriages are allowed and practised. A girl may even remain without marriage all her life-time; in such a case, she lives as a member of her father's family. But a woman without marriage is not considered fit to take part in ceremonies and when she dies, the funeral ceremonies performed are less formal than for a married woman. If an unmarried girl becomes pregnant, the parents are placed under a ban which can only be removed after her marriage in *Kudike* form to her paramour, if he be of the same caste. Should he be of a higher caste, he may either join her caste and marry her, or the parents have to pay a fine and give a dinner to the caste. The fault is then condoned, and the issue is regarded as being born in the caste. If an unmarried girl joins a man of a lower caste, she is discarded altogether from her community.

The prohibition to marry agnatic relations (known as belonging to the same family) is respected as long as the relationship can be traced; but as there are no exogamous names in vogue to keep up the recollection of the family, it is likely that the distinction gets lost in confusion in the course of two or three generations.

In marriages, *sódara* (meaning uterine) relationship, that is the relationship of maternal uncle's or paternal aunt's daughter is preferred. Marriage with an elder sister's daughter is not only allowed, but it is specially favoured. Two sisters may be married either by one man or by uterine brothers. The other standard which they have in testing the eligibility of the match is that the boy and the girl should not, either actually or by analogy, be related to each other as parent and child or brother and sister. Marriage with younger sister's daughter is

*The ceremony observed at the time of adoption is similar to that observed by the Kurubas as described in the account of that caste.

prohibited. A brother and sister of a family may marry a sister and brother respectively of another. Barring these limits, there are no prohibitions for marriage, based either on social status, local position or differences in religion or occupation.

To negotiate the marriage, the father of the boy goes to the house of the girl's father accompanied by some friends. He tells him : "We have come to eat rice and ghee in your house." After eating together, they talk over the matter and it is agreed that if other conditions (*Salavaḷi* ಸಾಲಾವಳಿ) are favourable, the match should take place. They call this *Voppu-vilya* (ಒಪ್ಪುವೀಳ್ಯ) or *tàmbùla* of agreement. This is followed by another preliminary ceremony called *Vilya-sastra* (ವೀಳ್ಯದಶಾಸ್ತ್ರ) ceremony of betel-leaves and nuts), also at the bride's place, to which the castemen and a Jangama are invited. Such business matters as the number and value of the jewels to be given to the girl, are then settled, and if both parties come to an agreement, a seat called Sangamesvara's Gaddige (ಸಂಗಮೇಶ್ವರನ ಗದ್ದಿಗೆ) is improvised, and the bell and spoon of the Chalavadi is placed thereon and *pùja* offered to it. The parties signify their agreement by exchange of *támbùla*. The new cloth brought by the bridegroom's father is presented to the girl, who puts on her *gala* dress, and sits on a plank in the assembly of the women. She is also presented with one of the jewels agreed to be given at her marriage, and flowers, fruit and other presents are placed in her garment. There is a dinner served at the end to all the persons assembled.

Marriage ceremonies.

Marriage proper may take place either at the girl's or the boy's house.

A day previous to the marriage, the bridegroom and his party arrive at the bride's place. They are met at some distance from the village, and are given jaggory water to quench their thirst. *Pan-supari* is distributed and then the party is led into the village and lodged in a house set apart for them.

The erection of the marriage pandal is the next event. It should have twelve pillars, that on the north-east corner being known as the *milk post* and being a branch of *Kalli* or of fig tree. In some places, a maternal uncle or other similar relative should cut this branch, while in others, it is sufficient if he is a man of the caste, born of parents regularly married. It is first deposited in some temple, and brought thence after *pùja*, and set up

in its place. The *pandal* has a canopy of washed clothes decorated with drawings in lime and saffron.

Women go to the potter's house to bring *Airaṇe* (ಐರಣೆಗಳು), that is, pots painted outside with red earth and chunam in a variety of designs. The potter is presented with a *haṇa* (4 As. 8 p.), rice and other provisions. The pots are brought to the house and kept in a row on a bed of manure spread for the purpose in a room.

They then go to a well and, after making *pûja*, bring water for the marriage in some vessels, walking in procession on washed cloths* spread along the road by one of their own caste. They have a general dinner after this in the marriage pandal. In some places (*e.g.*, Davangere) the bride and the bridegroom visit in succession, the houses of their castemen in the place, at which they are besmeared with turmeric paste as a token of congratulation, and partake of some refreshments. The party go to a temple where they make *pûja* to the *bhâshinga* (marriage chaplet), and bring it home in state, under a moving cloth canopy.

On the second day early in the morning, the bride and the bridegroom both get their nails pared†, not by a barber but by one of their own caste. The ostensible reason given is that a barber should not enter the marriage pandal, but the real reason seems to be that barbers decline to do this service for them. As tit for tat, the Agasas do not hold torches during the marriages of barbers. After bath, the bridegroom decked in new clothes, goes attended by a band of musicians to a temple. About this time, a green twig of *Nérale* or *Basari* tree is cut by the maternal uncle of the bride, and taken in state to the marriage house, where it is tied to the *milk post*.

From the temple where the bridegroom is seated, some of his party go to the bride's house thrice. The first time they carry rice, jaggory, saffron and betel-leaves, and return leaving the things there. The second time, the new clothes meant for the bride are similarly delivered. On the third trip, the bridegroom himself goes carrying a dagger in his hand followed by his best man, and taking with him all the jewels intended for the bride. As the procession approaches the pandal, the bride's party make a show of resistance by pelting the bridegroom's party with rice, the compliment being duly returned by the latter.

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* Called in Kannada, *nademadi* (ನಡೆಮಡಿ), that is, washed cloths for walking on.

† This is called Káluguru Sástra (ಕಾಲುಗುರುಶಾಸ್ತ್ರ).

Then the bridegroom comes to the marriage dais, to which the bride is subsequently conducted. A screen is thrown between the two Here the Purohit is called in. He is a Brahman in some places, a Jangama in some, while where neither is available, an elderly man of the caste conducts the ceremony. Rice, sesamum and cummin seed are put by the bride and the bridegroom on each other's heads, the screen is taken off and they garland each other. *Tàḷi* is tied by the bridegroom to the neck of the bride, and the union is completed.

This is followed by the tying of *kankaṇas*. Four metallic vessels are arranged in four corners, and round their necks a thread is passed three times. This is then cut into two halves and to each half is tied a turmeric root and a betel-leaf.

Lastly *dhàre* or the milk pouring ceremony takes place. The couple stand facing each other and keep their hands together holding a cocoanut, on which first the priest, then the parents of the couple, and lastly rest of the assembly, pour milk. During the time, the couple hold their hands alternately upon each other's. The milk thus poured in is caught in a tray held underneath their hands and ultimately thrown out on a Bilva tree or into a jasmine bush.

After this they sit side by side, with the ends of their garments knotted together, and each ties the *kankaṇa* (wrist-thread) to the other. They then rise and go round the *milk post* thrice and make *namaskàra* before the sacred pots. The assembly disperse after *támbúla,* and later on there is a general dinner.

The operative part of the ceremony is the tying of the *tàḷi*.

On the third day, the couple are anointed and bathed, and taken to an *Asvaththa* (Ficus Religiosus or the Peepul) tree, in procession, the bridegroom riding on a horse and the bride on a bull. They are seated side by side on a plank seat and their parents and other members of the congregation throw a handful of *Tumbe** flowers, this being a ceremony known as "*Tumbe Flower dhàre.*" Then each party again ties a *kankaṇa* thread with a betel leaf attached, to the other's wrist.

In the afternoon, after dinner, the *Simhàsana pùja* takes place. A black *kambli* or blanket is done into eight folds and

* *Tumbe* (ತುಂಬೆ) is a small herb (*Phlonis Indica*) the tiny white flowers of which, beautiful though devoid of smell, are believed to be a favourite of Siva, for whose worship they are largely employed in this part of India.

spread on a plank before the seat of the couple. This is called a *gaddige*. Betel-leaves are arranged in a circle on it, with areca nuts placed in a heap in the centre. Round the heap are kept lumps of *Vibhuti (ವಿಭೂತಿ) and the bell and the spoon (ಘಂಟೆ ಬಟ್ಟಲು), the insignia of the 18, Phaṇa people is brought by the Chalavadi and kept on the *gaddige*. After the married couple make *pūja* to this *gaddige*, the betel-leaves and arecanuts, placed in the heap, are distributed, in the known order of precedence, to all the assembled persons. The Gauda or headman of the caste is paid one rupee, and the Chalavadi gets a *Haṇa* (4 annas 8 pies) as their official fees.

On the fourth day, called *Nagavali*, the couple make *pūja* to the pillars of the pandal with the offerings of cooked rice and cakes. Their *kankaṇas* are taken off.

The next day, the milk post is removed after *puja*, part of which consists of pouring on it some water in which a bit of gold and a piece of coral have been washed.†

After the marriage ceremonies are thus finished, the bridegroom is sent back to his native place with his wife who is accompanied by her parents or others of her nearest relatives. The party halt at the boy's place for three days and then return with the girl. If the girl has already attained puberty, she will be allowed to live with her husband after the lapse of 15 days from the close of the marriage,‡ no fresh ceremony being then observed except giving her the presents of fruits and other articles filled in the folds of her cloth, and a dinner to the caste.

The boy or his party has to pay a price for the bride, the amount varying in different localities, between Bride-price.

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* *Vibhuti* is the name of the sacred ashes got by carefully burning cowdung cakes, so as to give clean white ashes. All worshippers of Siva smear their foreheads and limbs with this as an emblem of their faith.

Brahmans take it out of the sacred fire used for daily sacrifices. Sometimes, especially by Lingayats, the ashes are made into smooth white balls mixed with some starch. The symbolical meaning is that the ashes represent the remains of carnal desires burnt in the fire of *gnana* and *bhakti* (knowledge and devotion). It is connected also with the story of Kama's burning by Siva, which story indeed symbolises the triumph of knowledge over the senses.

†This ceremony is known in the Vernacular as ಚಿನ್ನದನೀರು ಹವಳದನೀರುಬಿಡುವುದು, *i.e.*, pouring of gold and coral water.

‡In some places a period of three months should elapse between the marriage and the consummation thereof. A few, however, put it off till the first *Gauri* feast after the marriage.

Rs. 12 and 24*. A widower marrying a spinster pays an enhanced price in some places, while in other places, this is compounded for by the present of more jewels.

The amount of marriage expenses cannot be determined with any definiteness. It depends on the means of the parties, the place they live in and other considerations, and it may be taken as ranging between Rs. 20 and Rs. 50 to the bride's party and Rs. 100 and Rs. 200 to that of the bridegroom, the latter including also the value of the presents to the bride, which of course is not lost to the parties.

Puberty ceremonies.

When a girl attains puberty, she is kept outside, as impure, in the yard in a shed erected out of green leaves of either Indian fig or the jack fruit tree (ಅತ್ತಿ or ಹಲಸು), for three or five days, and every evening she is seated on a *plank seat* and presents of cocoanuts, plantains and other fruits are given to her, and *arati*† performed by married women. The cloth worn by her at the time of attaining maturity will be given to a washerman of another family who has to wash her cloths and supply washed cloths to her every day during this period.

If the girl is already married, information of the event is sent to her husband either through the servant of the caste, called *hattara manushya* (ಹತ್ತರ ಮನುಷ್ಯ) or through the girl's brother or any other casteman. The husband or his people have, in some places, to pay Rs. 10 styled *nerada hana* (puberty money) towards the expenses incurred by the father of the girl for the puberty ceremonies and for feeding the girl during the period. If the girl is not married at the time, the parents have a right to be paid this sum by the man who subsequently offers to marry her. When the girl is already married, the

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* In some places, *e.g.*, Shimoga, the bridegroom gets Rs. 2 from his parents-in-law, styled *Mugadakai Honnu* (ಮುಗದಕೈಹೊನ್ನು).

†*Arati* is an important incident, though not a very essential part in all auspicious ceremonies. A flat metal dish is filled with water coloured red by means of *kunkuma* powder or turmeric and chunam, some grains of coloured rice are thrown into it, and the plate is held by two or sometimes more women, and waved before the chief actors in a marriage or other ceremony, just before they leave their stage. Songs are sung by women, the band if attending plays and Brahmans when present chant some *mantras* of grace and throw coloured rice on the actors by way of blessing.

The main object of the coloured water seems to be the warding off of the evil eye.

consummation takes place within the 16th day if possible, or on some later day.

Widow marriage.

Widow marriage is allowed and practised; but the husband must always be a widower. The ceremony is less solemn than the orthodox marriage, and is styled *tàli* tying. It is performed always after sunset, and in the dark fortnights of the month; and it is not necessary to get a lucky day fixed for it by a Brahman. On the day of the marriage, the *yajamàn*, the *gauda* and other castemen assemble on invitation and the spoon and bell of the *Chalavàdi* are kept on an improvised seat (*Sangamésvara's Gaddige*). The woman is bathed either by widowed women or those who have been married a second time, and dressed in new clothes given to her by her lover. She puts on silver and glass bangles, and is conducted into the assembly by widowed women. After obtaining the formal permission, for the union, of the *yajamàn* and the rest of the assembled persons, the husband ties the *tàli* to her neck. The ceremony closes with the distribution of *pan-supari* among the assembly, and a dinner given by the new husband.

A peculiar form of this ceremony is that which is observed at Davangere, in the Chitaldrug District, and thereabouts. The man after being bathed and dressed in new cloths is seated in a dark room, before the caste people assemble. The woman similarly bathed and dressed, is conducted into that room and knocks at the door. The man asks her who she is and what she has come there for; the woman replies that she has come to light a lamp in a dark house. Thereupon some women, married in *kúḍike* style, light a lamp in the room. The headman and other caste people give permission to the man to tie the *tàli*, after which *pan-supari* is distributed, and the proceedings close with a general dinner.

No married women attend the ceremony, nor are they allowed to see the newly married widow for three days after the ceremony. The *tera* or the bride's price paid is Rs. 7½, which goes towards the repayment of the *tera* of the first husband to his representatives.

The widow cannot marry her previous husband's brother, younger or elder; but she may marry any of his cousins. Again, she may marry as many times as she loses her husband or is abandoned by the latter, but, it is said that, at every subsequent marriage, she is entitled only to half the *tera* of the previous marriage.

The property which she might have inherited from her first husband has to be returned to his heirs, and the children also go back to his family. A woman marrying a second time is deprived of certain privileges and is, for purposes of joining any auspicious ceremonies, treated as if she were a widow. She cannot even enter a marriage pandal. Her issue for a few generations form a separate division, and are only gradually absorbed into the main body of the caste.

Divorce.

A man cannot divorce or abandon his wife for any other reason than adultery or loss of caste on her part. The latter is also a good ground for the wife to break the marriage tie. At the time of dissolution of marriage, the castemen and the *yajamàn* are called together, and the circumstances necessitating the divorce are laid before them. The council hear the parties and sometimes, when the complainant fails to make out his case, the parties are dismissed with an admonition, and a reconciliation is generally effected. But in most cases, parties do not go to the length of laying the matter before the panchayatas, unless the facts are likely to be proved by overwhelming evidence.

The divorced woman may marry another in *kùdike* form. If a man elopes with a married woman, and on this account a divorce is effected, he has to pay the marriage expenses to the previous husband and a fine to the caste, before he can marry the woman, the latter has also to return the *tàli* and any other jewels which she might have received from her previous husband. If a woman commits adultery with a man of any superior caste, the matter may be condoned by payment of a small fine to the caste; but adultery with a man of lower rank entails loss of caste.

Death ceremonies.

They generally bury their dead, but the bodies of pregnant women or lepers are disposed of either by burning or by *heaping stones over the dead bodies, though the latter practice is somewhat rare. Some of these following the practice of the Lingayats, carry the body placed in a sitting posture in a *vimàna*, and burying it in the same posture in a niche made in the grave; while others use a flat bier of bamboos, the body being carried and buried in a horizontal position with the head to the south. Keeping the bier down while going half way, and

* This practice is known in Kannada as *Kallu Sève* (ಕಲ್ಲುಸೇವೆ) meaning stone-service.

breaking a water pot at the grave, are also observed as among other castes. Nothing is buried with the body except half of the new cloth in which it had been wrapped, the other half being thrown away at the graveyard. On the grave, either *tulasi* or *tumbe* plants are planted. After the body is disposed of, the party bathe, return home and have to see a light kept burning on the spot where the deceased expired. In the night, a bunch of *Ekka* leaves and water in a small vessel are kept on ragi grain spread at the spot.

On the third day, the carriers, the chief mourner and some others go to the graveyard, keep milk, ghee and some other eatables on the grave. Milk and ghee are rubbed over the shoulders of the carriers.

The next ceremony in connection with the funerals is observed on the 11th day. Either a Jangama, or in some places, a Brahman is called to purify the house. Then the castemen and the chief mourner go to the burial ground, and offer cooked food and cakes at the grave. In the evening, a dinner is prepared. In the central part of the house, a *kalasa* is set up and after the offering of a cocoanut and the burning of incense near it, the following prayer is addressed to the deceased :—"You are no longer on earth but have joined your ancestors in the *Svarga*. We look up to you for the protection of ourselves and our family. O father ! protect us." Then all disperse shutting up the house so that the ghost may have an undisturbed meal of the good things spread before it, and returning after two or three minutes, they consume the victuals. Before eating, the chief mourner and some others go to a temple and, after *pûja* is done to the god, the chief mourner throws three balls of butter at the idol, saying " O god, the deceased might have thrown stones at you, but now for him we throw butter. Take mercy on him and open the door of *Svarga* for him to enter!"

They observe pollution only for three days but the chief mourner is not purified till the 11th day ceremony is over. During the period of pollution, they do not put on a mark on the forehead, do not attend to their profession and do not eat either flesh or sweet things.

They do not perform *sráddhas*. But periodically they offer *yaḍe* (ಎಡೆ) to all the deceased ancestors. They set up a *kalasa* in the central portion of the house, keep new clothes near it, burn incense, break a cocoanut and offer

also cooked food in the name of all the deceased ancestors. They observe this either during the Dasara or at the Dípávaḷi or Yugádi (new-year's-day) or on the new-moon day in the month of Bhádrapada (Mahálaya Amávásya), the last being the most common occasion.

The ghost of a deceased wife is believed often to torment or trouble her successor. If the latter is unable to suckle her new born babe or gets hysterical or otherwise ill, the first wife is propitiated by setting up a *kalas'a* in her name, and making *púja* to it, and also offering a new cloth which the second wife afterwards wears.

Social status.

They are a settled people and are found all over the State. They form part of the village corporation. They have no recognised head-quarters. There is nothing peculiar in the shape and material of their dwelling, except that at the approach to the house is first to be seen a place to shelter their asses, and an oven on which the dirty clothes are boiled for washing.

Admission to caste.

They have a ceremony for taking into their caste persons from higher castes such as Vakkaligas, Kurubas, and others. This is known as *Kulá máduvudu* (ಕುಲಾಮಾಡುವುದು), making the caste. After ascertaining that the original caste has no objection to one of their men being taken into this fold, they invite their own castemen from several *gaḍis* (divisions) to a meeting at which all the *Yajamáns* of the several divisions and others are present. If the candidate's resolution to join them has held out, he has to get shaved and bathe in a river or tank and worship Ganga (water goddess). After being given *tìrtha** he is made to pass successively through seven huts which are burnt soon after he leaves each. He bathes again and is given a paste of soap-nut and turmeric which he swallows. Then in the presence of the caste assembly, he makes *púja* to the spoon and bell—the symbol of the 18 Phaṇas, which with some *vibhúti* balls are placed on a black kambli *Gaddige*. The Kólkar applies some of the *vibhúti* ashes to his forehead. After this, there is a dinner, at which the recruit eats along with others, and is treated as one of the caste.

For a time, however, sometimes for a generation or two, he is looked upon as belonging to an inferior division

* Holy water in which the idol of a god is washed at the time of worship. A spoonful is given by the Pújari or worshipper to each devotee to drink.

like that of the offspring of *kúḍike* marriage, in the matter of intermarriages and taking part in important ceremonies, such as marriage.

Inheritance. As regards inheritance, the Agasas follow the ordinary Hindu Law. Widowed and destitute daughters and sisters are considered entitled to be maintained by the family.

Superstitions. They have, in common with others of a low standard of culture, a living belief in omens, oracles, magic and sorcery. The more unsophisticated among them believe that their god is present in their caste panchayat meetings and directs their collective wisdom in the way of arriving at a just decision, and that lying on such occasions will be attended with supernatural retribution. Their caste symbol (that is, the bell and the spoon suspended by chain) is placed prominently in such meetings and the disputants swear by this symbol to attest their truth.

Priests. In most cases their priests are Jangamas or their own headmen; but a few are in the habit of calling in Brahmans as purohits. Their guru (or spiritual head) is a Lingayat to whom they give periodical presents to get *tírtha* and *prasáda*. He receives *káṇike* (ಕಾಣಿಕೆ) or money presents during their marriages and other auspicious ceremonies.

Personal habits. They are flesh eaters and eat pork, mutton, fish and big lizards, but not beef. They also drink liquor both foreign and indigenous. The well-known lowest caste from the hands of which they eat are the Kurubas and Kumbaras and only Madigas and Holeyas eat in the houses of Agasas. Their touch is considered to defile a Brahman and the more orthodox among the latter do not put on the washed clothes returned by the washerman, without washing and drying them again.

Occupation. The original occupation of the caste is washing clothes. They are also employed as torch-bearers on festive occasions, and to show respect or light the way to persons of rank. They are also worshippers at some of the shrines of the humbler order. They do not wash the clothes of Holeyás* and Madigás.

The method of washing is to soak the clothes first in water, for which they go to a tank or a river, not

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* On the supposed alliance of the two castes, see the account of the Holeyás.

generally resorted to for bathing or drinking purposes. They then apply fuller's-earth and after partly drying, boil the clothes or steam them. Some indigo is then put in, and the clothes are again washed in pure water. Rice gruel is afterwards applied to such clothes as require starching, and they are also ironed when necessary. When washing cloths with borders of silk, they tie up the silk portion so as to protect it from injury from soda. They have huge earthen vessels for tubs and steaming pots. They beat the cloths on stones, and have wooden mallets (ಕೊಡತಿ) to compress the cloths when folded and use iron boxes to iron them.

They say that they were originally Baṇajigas and became subsequently separated from the latter by reason of their profession. Some have taken to agriculture and some are day labourers. Such of them as are agriculturists follow all the superstitions and other observances common to the raiyats, such as, not working bullocks on Mondays.

They form members of the village corporation, and have to give free service on occasions such as a procession of the gods. In some places, each washerman has certain families as his customers by hereditary usage, and others are not allowed to trespass on his preserve. But such usages are fast disappearing.

Wages.

As regards remuneration for services, the following is a rough scale of fees in villages not affected by the taint of advancing competition. For a family consisting of a husband and a wife and two children with aged parents, the washerman gets one bundle of unthreshed straw, one winnowful of grain at the threshing floor and twenty measures of grain with other perquisites such as food on all the feast days, and marriage and other auspicious occasions. The washerman is entitled to get the cloth worn by a girl at the time of her puberty, and to the presents given by her husband when he carries the news of the event. The clothes of unmarried persons in the family and those of the yajamân are washed free.

Religion.

They lean more towards the S'aiva than the Vaishṇava faith, though many profess the latter also. In fact, they are like other Hindus in showing reverence at all the recognised shrines. Their goddess is Lakshmidevi, the consort of Vishṇu. They also worship Hanumanta.

The minor gods they worship are numerous. In fact, no worship of the village goddesses can take place without the help of the Agasas, and they officiate as *pújaris*, especially when casual goddesses, such as, those of cholera and small-pox have to be worshipped, on the outbreak of an epidemic. These feminine deities are worshipped by preference on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Animals sacrificed (except buffaloes) are eaten by these men; and they get a share even when the sacrifices are offered by other castes. The share allotted to an Agasa out of the meat of the buffalo sacrificed to Mari, is given away to Holeyás or Mádigàs.

Their tribal god is Bhúmi Dévaru (Earth-god), which they worship during the Gauri* feast (August—September). On that day, they all bathe and keep themselves clean and eat only one meal. The washing tub, the steaming pot, oven, and the ironing implements are all washed and cleaned. They are placed together and worshipped with flowers and fruit and sometimes animals are offered to them. They observe it as a holiday and do not work with their implements. In large places, there are temples dedicated to Bhúmi Dévaru, worshipped by a man of this caste, to which they go and offer cocoanut to the idol, after their *Ubbe-púja* (worship of the washing tub) is done at home.

When any person in a village is suffering from some illness, supposed to have been caused by the *Seven sisters*, the washerman of the village is asked to do *púja* to these deities. He is given some money according to a recognized scale such as, one-half or-quarter of a *haṇa*. He sets up seven stones in a small shed constructed of green leaves outside the village generally near a water course, and places before them offerings of some fruit, fried Bengal gram and such other things. In fact, the Agasa seems to be the *pújari* of all the gods and goddesses that are worshipped near water courses and in groves.

The Agasas have in some places the custom of worshipping their family god once a year. The whole family observe a fast till the evening on the day of such worship. In the afternoon the idol representing the god is taken in procession, with music, to a water course, where it is washed and all the persons bathe. Sometimes a Brahman is called to do the purification rite (ಸಂಪ್ರೋಕ್ಷಣ) to the god and perform a *hóma* (sacrifice in the fire). After this, he retires and

* The 3rd day of the bright half of the lunar month of Bhàdrapada, which falls in August or September.

the castemen do *púja* to the god, breaking cocoanuts and waving camphor *àrati*. Then the idol is carried back with great pomp and set up outside the village boundary in a shed erected for the purpose. The god is again worshipped and offerings are made of cooked rice or animals according to usage.* From this spot, the idol is taken into the village and restored to its place in the temple. Then the several families attached to the god, individually offer cocoanuts to the idol and get *tírtha* and *prasáda*,† (holy water and holy victuals). In the night, a grand dinner is prepared and all castemen whether of the same group or not, are fed therein.

Other gods revered by this caste are Hiriyaṇṇa (ಹಿರಿಯಣ್ಣ) and Huṇasamma (ಹುಣಸಮ್ಮ). It is said that at the annual celebration of Hiriyanna's worship, buffaloes are sacrificed. This is perhaps the only instance in which this animal is sacrificed in the name of a male deity. Agasas apprehend misfortune if these celebrations are omitted.

They revere also as saints Maḍivàḷa Màchayya (ಮಡಿವಾಳ ಮಾಚಯ್ಯ) otherwise known as Vira Maḍivàḷappa (ವೀರಮಡಿವಾಳಪ್ಪ) and Mallige Màdevi (ಮಲ್ಲಿಗೆಮಾದೇವಿ). The male saint is worshipped in groves, and Jangamas are given doles of rice; but the worship of Mádevi takes place on *Sivaràtri* (ಶಿವರಾತ್ರಿ) occurring in February or March, at midnight, and strangers are not allowed to witness it. No part of the rice boiled for offering at this *púja*, is given to any of the lower castemen, such as Holeyàs and Màdigás.

Miscellaneous. Agasas belong to 18 Phaṇas or the right hand section. Among themselves, they have a caste headman called *gauḍa*, and caste servant styled *Hattara manushya* or Kólkar, the beadle. Their minor disputes are settled by their caste head, but where a matter is important, the Seṭṭi or (as he is more commonly known) Dès'ada Seṭṭi, who is the headman of all the castes forming the 18 Phaṇa-group, is called in, and his decision is final.

They have no peculiar theatrical entertainments in their own caste. Whenever torch-bearers are necessary in village dramas or elsewhere, they fill that position.

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*Animal sacrifices are made chiefly to the Sakti deities; and almost never to the higher order of gods.

† *Prasàda* means food and flowers offered to the idol. A little of it is given to each person by the *Pújari*.

Their women get tattooed, this operation being performed by a Koracha woman. Tattooing is considered auspicious for a married woman, and regarded as improving her personal appearance. All sorts of designs, such as, parrots, snakes, scorpions, and geometrical figures, are adopted. It is only married women* that get themselves tattooed, and if a girl becomes a widow before she is tattooed, she does not undergo the operation afterwards.

The married state of a woman is indicated by her wearing toe-rings, black beads and *tali*, and that of a man by the presence of toe-rings.

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*A married woman whose husband is alive, known as *Muttaide* (ಮುತ್ತೈದೆ), is alone entitled to adorn her person, and to take part in all auspicious ceremonies in which women have a share.